

Bahá'í Faith

The **Bahá'í Faith** (Persian: بهائی *Bahā'í*) is a religion teaching the essential worth of all religions, and the unity and equality of all people.^[1] Established by Bahá'u'lláh in 1863, it initially grew in Iran (Persia) and other parts of the Middle East region, where it has faced ongoing persecution since its inception.^[2] Currently it has between 5 and 7 million adherents, known as **Bahá'ís**, spread out into most of the world's countries and territories.^{[3][4]}

It grew from the mid-19th century Bábí religion, whose founder taught that God would soon send a prophet in the manner of Jesus or Muhammad.^[5] In 1863, after being banished from his native Iran, Bahá'u'lláh announced that he was this prophet. He was further exiled, spending over a decade in the prison city of Akka in the Ottoman province of Syria, in what is now Israel. Following Bahá'u'lláh's death in 1892, leadership of the religion fell to his son

`Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), and later his great-grandson Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957). Bahá'ís around the world annually elect local, regional, and national Spiritual Assemblies that govern the affairs of the religion, and every five years the members of all National Spiritual Assemblies elect the Universal House of Justice, the nine-member supreme governing institution of the worldwide Bahá'í community, which sits in Haifa, Israel near the shrine of Báb.

Bahá'í teachings are in some ways similar to other monotheistic faiths: God is considered single and all-powerful. However, Bahá'u'lláh taught that religion is orderly and progressively revealed by one God through Manifestations of God who are the founders of major world religions throughout history; Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad being the most recent in the period before the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. As such, Bahá'ís regard the major religions as fundamentally unified in purpose, though varied in social practices and interpretations. There is a similar emphasis on the unity of all people, openly rejecting notions of racism and nationalism. At the heart of Bahá'í teachings is the goal of a unified world order that ensures the prosperity of all nations, races, creeds, and classes.^{[6][7]}

Letters written by Bahá'u'lláh to various individuals, including some heads of state, have been collected and canonized into a body of Bahá'í scripture that includes works by his son `Abdu'l-Bahá, and also the Báb, who is regarded as Bahá'u'lláh's forerunner. Prominent among Bahá'í literature are the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, *Some Answered Questions*, and *The Dawn-Breakers*.



Seat of the Universal House of Justice, governing body of the Bahá'ís, in Haifa, Israel

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Etymology

In English-language use, the word *Bahá'í* is used either as an adjective to refer to the Bahá'í Faith or as a term for a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. The word is not a noun meaning the religion as a whole.^[8] It is derived from the Arabic *Bahá'* (بهاء), meaning "glory" or "splendor", although the word *Bahá'í* is actually derived from its use as a loan word in Persian, in particular the "'i" suffix is Persian rather than Arabic.^[note 1] The term "Bahaism" (or "Baha'ism") is still used, mainly in a pejorative sense.^{[9][10]}

Beliefs

Three core principles establish a basis for Bahá'í teachings and doctrine: the unity of God, the unity of religion, and the unity of humanity.^[11] From these postulates stems the belief that God periodically reveals his will through divine messengers, whose purpose is to transform the character of humankind and to develop, within those who respond, moral and spiritual qualities. Religion is thus seen as orderly, unified, and progressive from age to age.^[12]

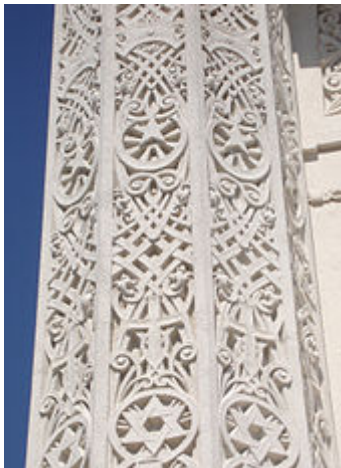
God

The Bahá'í writings describe a single, personal, inaccessible, omniscient, omnipresent, imperishable, and almighty God who is the creator of all things in the universe.^[13] The existence of God and the universe is thought to be eternal, without a beginning or end.^[14] Though inaccessible directly, God is nevertheless seen as conscious of creation, with a will and purpose that is expressed through messengers termed Manifestations of God.^{[15][16]}

Bahá'í teachings state that God is too great for humans to fully comprehend, or to create a complete and accurate image of, by themselves. Therefore, human understanding of God is achieved through his revelations via his Manifestations.^{[17][18]} In the Bahá'í religion, God is often referred to by titles and attributes (for example, the All-Powerful, or the All-Loving), and there is a substantial emphasis on monotheism. The Bahá'í teachings state that the attributes which are applied to God are used to translate Godliness into human terms and also to help individuals concentrate on their own attributes in worshipping God to develop their potentialities on their spiritual path.^{[17][18]} According to the Bahá'í teachings the human purpose is to learn to know and love God through such methods as prayer, reflection, and being of service to others.^[17]



Bahá'í Temple, Inglewood, Sydney, Australia



Symbols of many religions on a pillar of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, U.S.

Religion

Bahá'í notions of progressive religious revelation result in their accepting the validity of the well known religions of the world, whose founders and central figures are seen as Manifestations of God. Religious history is interpreted as a series of dispensations, where each *manifestation* brings a somewhat broader and more advanced revelation that is rendered as a text of scripture and passed on through history with greater or lesser reliability but at least true in substance,^[19] suited for the time and place in which it was expressed.^[14] Specific religious social teachings (for example, the direction of prayer, or dietary restrictions) may be revoked by a subsequent manifestation so that a more appropriate requirement for the time and place may be established. Conversely, certain general principles (for example, neighbourliness, or charity) are seen to be universal and consistent. In Bahá'í belief, this process of progressive revelation will not end; it is, however, believed to be cyclical. Bahá'ís do not expect a new manifestation of God to appear within 1000 years of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.^[20]

Bahá'í beliefs are sometimes described as syncretic combinations of earlier religious beliefs.^[21] Bahá'ís, however, assert that their religion is a distinct tradition with its own scriptures, teachings, laws, and history.^{[14][22]} While the religion was initially seen as a sect of Islam, most religious specialists now see it as an independent religion, with its religious background in Shi'a Islam being seen as analogous to the Jewish context in which Christianity was established.^[23] Muslim institutions and clergy, both Sunni and Shia, consider Bahá'ís to be deserters or apostates from Islam, which has led to Bahá'ís being persecuted.^{[24][25]} Bahá'ís describe their faith as an independent world religion, differing from the other traditions in its relative age and in the appropriateness of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the modern context.^[26] Bahá'u'lláh is believed to have fulfilled the messianic expectations of these precursor faiths.^[27]

Human beings

The Bahá'í writings state that human beings have a "rational soul", and that this provides the species with a unique capacity to recognize God's status and humanity's relationship with its creator. Every human is seen to have a duty to recognize God through his messengers, and to conform to their teachings.^[28] Through recognition and obedience, service to humanity and regular prayer and spiritual practice, the Bahá'í writings state that the soul becomes closer to God, the spiritual ideal in Bahá'í belief. When a human dies, the soul passes into the next world, where its spiritual development in the physical world becomes a basis for judgment



The Ringstone symbol represents humanity's connection to God.

and advancement in the spiritual world. Heaven and Hell are taught to be spiritual states of nearness or distance from God that describe relationships in this world and the next, and not physical places of reward and punishment achieved after death.^[29]

The Bahá'í writings emphasize the essential equality of human beings, and the abolition of prejudice. Humanity is seen as essentially one, though highly varied; its diversity of race and culture are seen as worthy of appreciation and acceptance. Doctrines of racism, nationalism, caste, social class, and gender-based hierarchy are seen as artificial impediments to unity.^[11] The Bahá'í teachings state that the unification of humanity is the paramount issue in the religious and political conditions of the present world.^[14]

Summary

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the religion from 1921 to 1957, wrote the following summary of what he considered to be the distinguishing principles of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, which, he said, together with the laws and ordinances of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* constitute the bedrock of the Bahá'í Faith:

The independent search after truth, unfettered by superstition or tradition; the oneness of the entire human race, the pivotal principle and fundamental doctrine of the Faith; the basic unity of all religions; the condemnation of all forms of prejudice, whether religious, racial, class or national; the harmony which must exist between religion and science; the equality of men and women, the two wings on which the bird of human kind is able to soar; the introduction of compulsory education; the adoption of a universal auxiliary language; the abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty; the institution of a world tribunal for the adjudication of disputes between nations; the exaltation of work, performed in the spirit of service, to the rank of worship; the glorification of justice as the ruling principle in human society, and of religion as a bulwark for the protection of all peoples and nations; and the establishment of a permanent and universal peace as the supreme goal of all mankind—these stand out as the essential elements [which Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed].^[30]

Social principles

The following principles are frequently listed as a quick summary of the Bahá'í teachings. They are derived from transcripts of speeches given by `Abdu'l-Bahá during his tour of Europe and North America in 1912.^{[31][32]} The list is not authoritative and a variety of such lists circulate.^{[22][33]}

- Unity of God
- Unity of religion
- Unity of humanity
- Unity in diversity
- Equality between men and women
- Elimination of all forms of prejudice
- World peace and a New world order
- Harmony of religion and science
- Independent investigation of truth
- Principle of Ever-Advancing Civilization
- Universal compulsory education
- Universal auxiliary language^[note 2]
- Obedience to government and non-involvement in partisan politics unless submission to law amounts to a denial of Faith.^[note 3]
- Elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty
- Spiritual solutions to economic problems

With specific regard to the pursuit of world peace, Bahá'u'lláh prescribed a world-embracing collective security arrangement for the establishment of a temporary era of peace referred to in the Baha'i teachings as the Lesser Peace. For the establishment of a lasting peace (The Most Great Peace) and the purging of the 'overwhelming Corruptions' it is necessary that all the people of the world universally unite under a universal Faith.^[34]

Covenant

The Bahá'í teachings speak of a "Greater Covenant",^[35] being universal and endless, and a "Lesser Covenant", being unique to each religious dispensation. The Lesser Covenant is viewed as an agreement between a Messenger of God and his followers and includes social practices and the continuation of authority in the religion. At this time Bahá'ís view Bahá'u'lláh's revelation as a binding lesser covenant for his followers; in the Bahá'í writings being firm in the covenant is considered a virtue to work toward.^[36] The Greater Covenant is viewed as a more enduring agreement between God and humanity, where a Manifestation of God is expected to come to humanity about every thousand years, at times of turmoil and uncertainty. With unity as an essential teaching of the religion, Bahá'ís follow an administration they believe is divinely ordained, and therefore see attempts to create schisms and divisions as efforts that are contrary to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Schisms have occurred over the succession of authority, but any Bahá'í divisions have had relatively little success and have failed to attract a sizeable following.^[37] The followers of such divisions are regarded as Covenant-breakers and shunned, essentially excommunicated.^{[36][38]}

Canonical texts

The *canonical texts* are the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, and the authenticated talks of `Abdu'l-Bahá. The writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are considered as divine revelation, the writings and talks of `Abdu'l-Bahá and the writings of Shoghi Effendi as authoritative interpretation, and those of the Universal House of Justice as authoritative legislation and elucidation. Some measure of divine guidance is assumed for all of these texts.^[39] Some of Bahá'u'lláh's most important writings include the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, literally the *Most Holy Book*, which defines many laws and practices for individuals and society,^[40] the Kitáb-i-Íqán, literally the *Book of Certitude*, which became the foundation of much of Bahá'í belief,^[41] the Gems of Divine Mysteries, which includes further doctrinal foundations, and the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys which are mystical treatises.^[42]

Mystical writings

Although the Bahá'í teachings have a strong emphasis on social and ethical issues, there exist a number of foundational texts that have been described as mystical.^[14] The *Seven Valleys* is considered Bahá'u'lláh's "greatest mystical composition." It was written to a follower of Sufism, in the style of `Attar, The Persian Muslim poet,^[43] and sets forth the stages of the soul's journey towards God. It was first translated into English in 1906, becoming one of the earliest available books of Bahá'u'lláh to the West. The Hidden Words is another book written by Bahá'u'lláh during the same period, containing 153 short passages in which Bahá'u'lláh claims to have taken the basic essence of certain spiritual truths and written them in brief form.^[44]

History

The Bahá'í Faith formed from the Persian religion of the Báb, a merchant who began preaching a new interpretation of Shia Islam in 1844. The Báb's claim to divine revelation was rejected by the generality of Islamic clergy in Iran, ending in his public execution by authorities in 1850. The Báb taught that God would soon send a new messenger, and Bahá'ís consider Bahá'u'lláh to be that person.^[5] Although they are distinct movements, the Báb is so interwoven into Bahá'í theology and history that Bahá'ís celebrate his birth, death, and declaration as holy days, consider him one of their three central figures (along with

Bahá'í timeline

1844 The Báb declares his mission in Shiraz, Iran

1850 The Báb is publicly

Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá), and a historical account of the Bábí movement (*The Dawn-Breakers*) is considered one of three books that every Bahá'í should "master" and read "over and over again".^[45]

The Bahá'í community was mostly confined to the Persian and Ottoman empires until after the death of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892, at which time he had followers in 13 countries of Asia and Africa.^[46] Under the leadership of his son, `Abdu'l-Bahá, the religion gained a footing in Europe and America, and was consolidated in Iran, where it still suffers intense persecution.<sup>[47]</sup> After the death of `Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921, the leadership of the Bahá'í community entered a new phase, evolving from a single individual to a administrative order with both elected bodies and appointed individuals.^[48]

The Báb



Shrine of the Báb in Haifa, Israel

On the evening of 22 May 1844, Siyyid `Alí-Muhammad of Shiraz proclaimed that he was "the Báb" (الباب "the Gate"), referring to his later claim to the status of Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam of Shi`a Islam.^[47] His followers were therefore known as Bábís. As the Báb's teachings spread, which the Islamic clergy saw as a threat, his followers came under increased persecution and torture.^[14] The conflicts escalated in several places to military sieges by the Shah's army. The Báb himself was imprisoned and eventually executed in 1850.^[49]

Bahá'ís see the Báb as the forerunner of the Bahá'í Faith, because the Báb's writings introduced the concept of "He whom God shall make manifest", a Messianic figure whose coming, according to Bahá'ís, was announced in the scriptures of all of the world's great religions, and whom Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith,

claimed to be in 1863.^[14] The Báb's tomb, located in Haifa, Israel, is an important place of pilgrimage for Bahá'ís. The remains of the Báb were brought secretly from Iran to the Holy Land and eventually interred in the tomb built for them in a spot specifically designated by Bahá'u'lláh.^[50] The main written works translated into English of the Báb's are collected in Selections from the Writings of the Báb out of the estimated 135 works.^[51]

Bahá'u'lláh

Mírzá Husayn `Alí Núrí was one of the early followers of the Báb, and later took the title of Bahá'u'lláh. Bábís faced a period of persecution that peaked in 1852–53 after a few individuals made a failed attempt to assassinate the Shah. Although they acted alone, the government responded with collective punishment, killing many Bábís. Bahá'u'lláh was put in prison. He claimed that in 1853, while incarcerated in the dungeon of the Síyáh-Chál in Tehran, he received the first intimations that he was the one anticipated by the Báb when he received a visit from the Maid of Heaven.^[11]

Shortly thereafter he was expelled from Tehran to Baghdad, in the Ottoman Empire;^[11] then to Constantinople (now Istanbul); and then to Adrianople (now Edirne). In 1863, at the time of his banishment from Baghdad to Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh declared his claim to a divine mission to his family and followers. Tensions then grew between him and Subh-i-Azal, the appointed leader of the Bábís who did not recognize Bahá'u'lláh's claim.

executed in
Tabriz, Iran

1852 Thousands of
Bábís are
executed

Bahá'u'lláh is
imprisoned and
forced into
exile

1863 Bahá'u'lláh first
announces his
claim to divine
revelation

He is forced to
leave Baghdad
for
Constantinople,
then
Adrianople

1868 Bahá'u'lláh is
forced into
harsher
confinement in
`Akká,
Palestine

1892 Bahá'u'lláh dies
near `Akká

His will
appointed
`Abdu'l-Bahá
as successor

1908 `Abdu'l-Bahá is
released from
prison

1921 `Abdu'l-Bahá
dies in Haifa

His will
appoints
Shoghi Effendi
as Guardian

1957 Shoghi Effendi
dies in England

1963 The Universal
House of
Justice is first
elected

Throughout the rest of his life Bahá'u'lláh gained the allegiance of most of the Bábís, who came to be known as Bahá'ís. Beginning in 1866, he began declaring his mission as a Messenger of God in letters to the world's religious and secular rulers, including Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III, and Queen Victoria.

Bahá'u'lláh was banished by Sultan Abdülâziz a final time in 1868 to the Ottoman penal colony of `Akká, in present-day Israel. Towards the end of his life, the strict and harsh confinement was gradually relaxed, and he was allowed to live in a home near `Akká, while still officially a prisoner of that city.^[52] He died there in 1892. Bahá'ís regard his resting place at Bahjí as the Qiblih to which they turn in prayer each day.^[53]

`Abdu'l-Bahá

`Abbás Effendi was Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, known by the title of `Abdu'l-Bahá (Servant of Bahá). His father left a Will that appointed `Abdu'l-Bahá as the leader of the Bahá'í community, and designated him as the "Centre of the Covenant", "Head of the Faith", and the sole authoritative interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's writings.<sup>[50][54]</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá had shared his father's long exile and imprisonment, which continued until `Abdu'l-Bahá's own release as a result of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. Following his release he led a life of travelling, speaking, teaching, and maintaining correspondence with communities of believers and individuals, expounding the principles of the Bahá'í Faith.^[11]

There are over 27,000 extant documents by `Abdu'l-Bahá, mostly letters, of which only a fraction have been translated into English.^[51] Among the more well known are *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, the *Tablet to Auguste-Henri Forel*, and *Some Answered Questions*. Additionally notes taken of a number of his talks were published in various volumes like *Paris Talks* during his journeys to the West.



`Abdu'l-Bahá

Bahá'í administration

Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and *The Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá* are foundational documents of the Bahá'í administrative order. Bahá'u'lláh established the elected Universal House of Justice, and `Abdu'l-Bahá established the appointed hereditary Guardianship and clarified the relationship between the two institutions.^{[50][55]} In his Will, `Abdu'l-Bahá appointed his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the first Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, serving as head of the religion until his death, for 36 years.^[56]

Shoghi Effendi throughout his lifetime translated Bahá'í texts; developed global plans for the expansion of the Bahá'í community; developed the Bahá'í World Centre; carried on a voluminous correspondence with communities and individuals around the world; and built the administrative structure of the religion, preparing the community for the election of the Universal House of Justice.^[11] He died in 1957 under conditions that did not allow for a successor to be appointed.^{[57][58]}

At local, regional, and national levels, Bahá'ís elect members to nine-person Spiritual Assemblies, which run the affairs of the religion. There are also appointed individuals working at various levels, including locally and internationally, which perform the function of propagating the teachings and protecting the community. The latter do not serve as clergy, which the Bahá'í Faith does not have.^{[14][59]} The Universal House of Justice, first elected in 1963, remains the successor and supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, and its 9 members are elected every five years by the members of all National Spiritual Assemblies.^[60] Any male Bahá'í, 21 years or older, is eligible to be elected to the Universal House of Justice; all other positions are open to male and female Bahá'ís.^[61]

International plans

In 1937, Shoghi Effendi launched a seven-year plan for the Bahá'ís of North America, followed by another in 1946.^[62] In 1953, he launched the first international plan, the Ten Year World Crusade. This plan included extremely ambitious goals for the expansion of Bahá'í communities and institutions, the translation of Bahá'í texts into several new languages, and the sending of Bahá'í pioneers into previously unreached nations.^[63] He announced in letters during the Ten Year Crusade that it would be followed by other plans under the direction of the Universal House of Justice, which was elected in 1963 at the culmination of the Crusade. The House of Justice then launched a nine-year plan in 1964, and a series of subsequent multi-year plans of varying length and goals followed, guiding the direction of the international Bahá'í community.^[64]



Bahá'í House of Worship, Wilmette, Illinois

Annually, on 21 April, the Universal House of Justice sends a 'Ridván' message to the worldwide Bahá'í community,^[65] which generally gives an update on the progress made concerning the current plan, and provides further guidance for the year to come.^[note 4] The Bahá'ís around the world are currently being encouraged to focus on capacity building through children's classes, youth groups, devotional gatherings, and a systematic study of the religion known as study circles.^{[66][67]} Further focuses are involvement in social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society.^{[68][69]} The years from 2001 until 2021 represent four successive five-year plans, culminating in the centennial anniversary of the passing of `Abdu'l-Bahá.^[70]

Demographics

A Bahá'í published document reported 4.74 million Bahá'ís in 1986 growing at a rate of 4.4%.^[71] Bahá'í sources since 1991 usually estimate the worldwide Bahá'í population to be above 5 million.^[72] The *World Christian Encyclopedia* estimated 7.1 million Bahá'ís in the world in 2000, representing 218 countries,^[73] and 7.3 million in 2010^[74] with the same source. They further state: "The Baha'i Faith is the only religion to have grown faster in every United Nations region over the past 100 years than the general population; Baha'i was thus the fastest-growing religion between 1910 and 2010, growing at least twice as fast as the population of almost every UN region."^[75] This source's only systematic flaw was to consistently have a higher estimate of Christians than other cross-national data sets.^[76]



The Lotus Temple, a Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, India. It attracts an average of 4 million visitors a year.

From its origins in the Persian and Ottoman Empires, by the early 20th century there were a number of converts in South and South East Asia, Europe, and North America. During the 1950s and 1960s, vast travel teaching efforts brought the religion to almost every country and territory of the world. By the 1990s, Bahá'ís were developing programs for systematic consolidation on a large scale, and the early 21st century saw large influxes of new adherents around the world. The Bahá'í Faith is currently the largest religious minority in Iran,^[77] Panama,^[78] Belize,^[79] and South Carolina,^[80] the second largest international religion in Bolivia,^[81] Zambia,^[82] and Papua New Guinea,^[83] and the third largest international religion in Chad^{[84][85]} and Kenya.^[86]

According to *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2004*:

The majority of Bahá'ís live in Asia (3.6 million), Africa (1.8 million), and Latin America (900,000). According to some estimates, the largest Bahá'í community in the world is in India, with 2.2 million Bahá'ís, next is Iran, with 350,000, the US, with 150,000, and Brazil, with 60,000. Aside from these countries, numbers vary greatly. Currently, no country has a Bahá'í majority.^[87]

The Bahá'í Faith is a medium-sized religion^[88] and was listed in *The Britannica Book of the Year* (1992–present) as the second most widespread of the world's independent religions in terms of the number of countries represented. According to *Britannica*, the Bahá'í Faith (as of 2010) is established in 221 countries and territories and has an estimated seven million adherents worldwide.^[3] Additionally, Bahá'ís have self-organized in most of the nations of the world.

The Bahá'í religion was ranked by the Foreign Policy magazine as the world's second fastest growing religion by percentage (1.7%) in 2007.^[89]

Social practices

Exhortations

The following are a few examples from Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on personal conduct that are required or encouraged of his followers.

- Bahá'ís over the age of 15 should individually recite an obligatory prayer each day, using fixed words and form.
- In addition to the daily obligatory prayer, Bahá'ís should offer daily devotional prayer and to meditate and study sacred scripture.
- Adult Bahá'ís should observe a fast each year during daylight hours for 19 days in March, with certain exemptions.
- There are specific requirements for Bahá'í burial that include a specified prayer to be read at the interment. Embalming or cremating the body are strongly discouraged.
- Bahá'ís should make a 19% voluntary payment on any wealth in excess of what is necessary to live comfortably, after the remittance of any outstanding debt. These Huqúqu'lláh payments are to be used for philanthropic purposes.

Prohibitions

The following are a few examples from Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on personal conduct that are prohibited or discouraged.

- Backbiting and gossip are prohibited and denounced.
- Drinking or selling alcohol is forbidden.
- Sexual intercourse is only permitted between a husband and wife, and thus premarital, extramarital, or homosexual intercourse are forbidden. (See also *Homosexuality and the Bahá'í Faith*)
- Abstaining from partisan politics is required.
- Begging as a profession is forbidden.

While some of the laws from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are applicable at the present time, others are dependent upon the existence of a predominantly Bahá'í society, such as the punishments for arson or murder. The laws, when not in direct conflict with the civil laws of the country of residence, are binding on every Bahá'í,^[90] and the observance of personal laws, such as prayer or fasting, is the sole responsibility of the individual.^{[91][92]}



Bahá'í gardens in Haifa, Israel

Marriage

The purpose of marriage in the Bahá'í faith is mainly to foster spiritual harmony, fellowship and unity between a man and a woman and to provide a stable and loving environment for the rearing of children.^[93] The Bahá'í teachings on marriage call it a *fortress for well-being and salvation* and place marriage and the family as the foundation of the structure of human society.^[94] Bahá'u'lláh highly praised marriage, discouraged divorce, and required chastity outside of marriage; Bahá'u'lláh taught that a husband and wife should strive to improve the spiritual life of each other.^[95] Interracial marriage is also highly praised throughout Bahá'í scripture.^[94]

Bahá'ís intending to marry are asked to obtain a thorough understanding of the other's character before deciding to marry.^[94] Although parents should not choose partners for their children, once two individuals decide to marry, they must receive the consent of all living biological parents, whether they are Bahá'í or not. The Bahá'í marriage ceremony is simple; the only compulsory part of the wedding is the reading of the wedding vows prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh which both the groom and the bride read, in the presence of two witnesses.^[94] The vows are "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God."^[94]

Work

Bahá'u'lláh prohibited a mendicant and ascetic lifestyle.^[96] Monasticism is forbidden, and Bahá'ís are taught to practice spirituality while engaging in useful work.^[14] The importance of self-exertion and service to humanity in one's spiritual life is emphasised further in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, where he states that work done in the spirit of service to humanity enjoys a rank equal to that of prayer and worship in the sight of God.^[14]

Places of worship

Most Bahá'í meetings occur in individuals' homes, local Bahá'í centers, or rented facilities. Worldwide, there are currently seven Bahá'í Houses of Worship, with an eighth near completion ^[97] in Chile,^[98] and a further seven planned as of April 2012.^[99] Bahá'í writings refer to an institution called a "Mashriqu'l-Adhkár" (Dawning-place of the Mention of God), which is to form the center of a complex of institutions including a hospital, university, and so on.^[100] The first ever Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in `Ishqábád, Turkmenistan, has been the most complete House of Worship.^[101]



Bahá'í House of Worship,
Langenhain, Germany

Calendar

The Bahá'í calendar is based upon the calendar established by the Báb. The year consists of 19 months, each having 19 days, with four or five intercalary days, to make a full solar year.^[11] The Bahá'í New Year corresponds to the traditional Persian New Year, called Naw Rúz, and occurs on the vernal equinox, near 21 March, at the end of the month of fasting. Bahá'í communities gather at the beginning of each month at a meeting called a Feast for worship, consultation and socializing.^[14]

Each of the 19 months is given a name which is an attribute of God; some examples include Bahá' (Splendour), 'Ilm (Knowledge), and Jamál (Beauty).^[102] The Bahá'í week is familiar in that it consists of seven days, with each day of the week also named after an attribute of God. Bahá'ís observe 11 Holy Days throughout the year, with work suspended on 9 of these. These days commemorate important anniversaries in the history of the religion.^[103]

Symbols

The symbols of the religion are derived from the Arabic word Bahá' (بهاء "splendor" or "glory"), with a numerical value of 9, which is why the most common symbol is the nine-pointed star.^[104] The ringstone symbol and calligraphy of the Greatest Name are also often encountered. The former consists of two five-pointed stars interspersed with a stylized Bahá' whose shape is meant to recall the three onenesses,^[105] while the latter is a calligraphic rendering of the phrase Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá (يا بهاء الأبهى "O Glory of the Most Glorious!").



The calligraphy of the Greatest Name

The five-pointed star is the symbol of the Bahá'í Faith.^{[106][107]} In the Bahá'í Faith, the star is known as the **Haykal** (Arabic: "temple"), and it was initiated and established by the Báb. The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh wrote various works in the form of a pentagram.^[108]

Socio-economic development

Since its inception the Bahá'í Faith has had involvement in socio-economic development beginning by giving greater freedom to women,^[110] promulgating the promotion of female education as a priority concern,^[111] and that involvement was given practical expression by creating schools, agricultural coops, and clinics.^[110]

The religion entered a new phase of activity when a message of the Universal House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 was released. Bahá'ís were urged to seek out ways, compatible with the Bahá'í teachings, in which they could become involved in the social and economic development of the communities in which they lived. Worldwide in 1979 there were 129 officially recognized Bahá'í socio-economic development projects. By 1987, the number of officially recognized development projects had increased to 1482.^[64]



Students of *School for Girls*, Tehran, 13 August 1933. This photograph may be of the students of *Tarbiyat School for Girls* which was established by the Bahá'í Community of Tehran in 1911; the school was closed by government decree in 1934.^[109]

United Nations

Bahá'u'lláh wrote of the need for world government in this age of humanity's collective life. Because of this emphasis the international Bahá'í community has chosen to support efforts of improving international relations through organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, with some reservations about the present structure and constitution of the UN.^[112] The Bahá'í International Community is an agency under the direction of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, and has consultative status with the following organizations:^{[113][114]}

- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
- United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- World Health Organization (WHO)

The Bahá'í International Community has offices at the United Nations in New York and Geneva and representations to United Nations regional commissions and other offices in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Nairobi, Rome, Santiago, and Vienna.^[114] In recent years an Office of the Environment and an Office for the Advancement of Women were

established as part of its United Nations Office. The Bahá'í Faith has also undertaken joint development programs with various other United Nations agencies. In the 2000 Millennium Forum of the United Nations a Bahá'í was invited as the only non-governmental speaker during the summit.^[115]

Persecution

Bahá'ís continue to be persecuted in Islamic countries, as Islamic leaders do not recognize the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion, but rather as apostasy from Islam. The most severe persecutions have occurred in Iran, where more than 200 Bahá'ís were executed between 1978 and 1998,^[77] and in Egypt. The rights of Bahá'ís have been restricted to greater or lesser extents in numerous other countries, including Afghanistan,^[116] Indonesia,^[117] Iraq,^[118] Morocco,^{[119][120]}, Yemen^[121] and several countries in sub-Saharan Africa.^[64]



The Bahá'í cemetery in Yazd after its desecration by the Iranian government

Iran

The marginalization of the Iranian Bahá'ís by current governments is rooted in historical efforts by Muslim clergy to persecute the religious minority. When the Báb started attracting a large following, the clergy hoped to stop the movement from spreading by stating that its followers were enemies of God. These clerical directives led to mob attacks and public executions.^[47] Starting in the twentieth century, in addition to repression aimed at individual Bahá'ís, centrally directed campaigns that targeted the entire Bahá'í community and its institutions were initiated.^[122] In one case in Yazd in 1903 more than 100 Bahá'ís were killed.^[123] Bahá'í schools, such as the Tarbiyat boys' and girls' schools in Tehran, were closed in the 1930s and 1940s, Bahá'í marriages were not recognized and Bahá'í texts were censored.^{[122][124]}

During the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to divert attention from economic difficulties in Iran and from a growing nationalist movement, a campaign of persecution against the Bahá'ís was instituted.^[note 5] An approved and coordinated anti-Bahá'í campaign (to incite public passion against the Bahá'ís) started in 1955 and it included the spreading of anti-Bahá'í propaganda on national radio stations and in official newspapers.^[122] In the late 1970s the Shah's regime consistently lost legitimacy due to criticism that it was pro-Western. As the anti-Shah movement gained ground and support, revolutionary propaganda was spread which alleged that some of the Shah's advisors were Bahá'ís.^[125] Bahá'ís were portrayed as economic threats, and as supporters of Israel and the West, and societal hostility against the Bahá'ís increased.^{[122][126]}

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 Iranian Bahá'ís have regularly had their homes ransacked or have been banned from attending university or from holding government jobs, and several hundred have received prison sentences for their religious beliefs, most recently for participating in study circles.^[77] Bahá'í cemeteries have been desecrated and property has been seized and occasionally demolished, including the House of Mírzá Buzurg, Bahá'u'lláh's father.^[47] The House of the Báb in Shiraz, one of three sites to which Bahá'ís perform pilgrimage, has been destroyed twice.^{[47][127][128]}

According to a US panel, attacks on Bahá'ís in Iran increased under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency.^{[129][130]} The United Nations Commission on Human Rights revealed an October 2005 confidential letter from Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces of Iran ordering its members to identify Bahá'ís and to monitor their activities. Due to these actions, the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights stated on 20 March 2006, that she "also expresses concern that the information gained as a result of such monitoring will be used as a

basis for the increased persecution of, and discrimination against, members of the Bahá'í faith, in violation of international standards. The Special Rapporteur is concerned that this latest development indicates that the situation with regard to religious minorities in Iran is, in fact, deteriorating.^[131]

On 14 May 2008, members of an informal body known as the "Friends" that oversaw the needs of the Bahá'í community in Iran were arrested and taken to Evin prison.^{[129][132]} The Friends court case has been postponed several times, but was finally underway on 12 January 2010.^[133] Other observers were not allowed in the court. Even the defence lawyers, who for two years have had minimal access to the defendants, had difficulty entering the courtroom. The chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said that it seems that the government has already predetermined the outcome of the case and is violating international human rights law.^[133] Further sessions were held on 7 February 2010,^[134] 12 April 2010^[135] and 12 June 2010.^[136] On 11 August 2010 it became known that the court sentence was 20 years imprisonment for each of the seven prisoners^[137] which was later reduced to ten years.^[138] After the sentence, they were transferred to Gohardasht prison.^[139] In March 2011 the sentences were reinstated to the original 20 years.^[140] On 3 January 2010, Iranian authorities detained ten more members of the Baha'i minority, reportedly including Leva Khanjani, granddaughter of Jamaloddin Khanjani, one of seven Baha'i leaders jailed since 2008 and in February, they arrested his son, Niki Khanjani.^[141]

The Iranian government claims that the Bahá'í Faith is not a religion, but is instead a political organization, and hence refuses to recognize it as a minority religion.^[142] However, the government has never produced convincing evidence supporting its characterization of the Bahá'í community.^[143] Also, the government's statements that Bahá'ís who recanted their religion would have their rights restored, attest to the fact that Bahá'ís are persecuted solely for their religious affiliation.^[144] The Iranian government also accuses the Bahá'í Faith of being associated with Zionism because the Bahá'í World Centre is located in Haifa, Israel.^[note 6] These accusations against the Bahá'ís have no basis in historical fact,^{[145][126][146]} and the accusations are used by the Iranian government to use the Bahá'ís as "scapegoats".^[147] In fact it was the Iranian leader Naser al-Din Shah Qajar who banished Bahá'u'lláh from Persia to the Ottoman Empire and Bahá'u'lláh was later exiled by the Ottoman Sultan, at the behest of the Persian Shah, to territories further away from Iran and finally to Acre in Syria, which only a century later was incorporated into the state of Israel.^[148]

Egypt

Bahá'í institutions and community activities have been illegal under Egyptian law since 1960. All Bahá'í community properties, including Bahá'í centers, libraries, and cemeteries, have been confiscated by the government and fatwas have been issued charging Bahá'ís with apostasy.^[149]

The Egyptian identification card controversy began in the 1990s when the government modernized the electronic processing of identity documents, which introduced a de facto requirement that documents must list the person's religion as Muslim, Christian, or Jewish (the only three religions officially recognized by the government). Consequently, Bahá'ís were unable to obtain government identification documents (such as national identification cards, birth certificates, death certificates, marriage or divorce certificates, or passports) necessary to exercise their rights in their country unless they lied about their religion, which conflicts with Bahá'í religious principle. Without documents, they could not be employed, educated, treated in hospitals, travel outside of the country, or vote, among other hardships.^[150] Following a protracted legal process culminating in a court ruling favorable to the Bahá'ís, the interior minister of Egypt released a decree on 14 April 2009, amending the law to allow Egyptians who are not Muslim, Christian, or Jewish to obtain identification documents that list a dash in place of one of the three recognized religions.^[151] The first identification cards were issued to two Bahá'ís under the new decree on 8 August 2009.^[152]

See also

- Outline of the Bahá'í Faith
- Criticism of the Bahá'í Faith

- [Baha'i view on Muhammad](#)
- [Bahá'í Faith in fiction](#)
- [Bahá'í orthography](#)
- [Bahá'í Terraces](#), the Hanging Gardens of Haifa
- [List of Bahá'ís](#)
- [List of former Bahá'ís](#)
- [Political objections to the Baha'i Faith](#)

Notes

1. Bahá'ís prefer the orthographies *Bahá'í* , *Bahá'ís*, *the Báb*, *Bahá'u'lláh*, and *`Abdu'l-Bahá* , using a [particular transcription](#) of the [Arabic](#) and [Persian](#) in publications. "Bahai", "Bahais", "Baha'i", "the Bab", "Bahauallah" and "Baha'u'llah" are often used when diacriticals are unavailable.
2. For an annotated compilation of excerpts from the Bahá'í writings regarding the principle of International or Universal Auxiliary Language, see *The Greatest Instrument for Promoting Harmony and Civilization: Excerpts from the Bahá'í Writings and Related Sources on the Question of an International Auxiliary Language*. Oxford: George Ronald. 2015. [ISBN 978-085398-591-4](#)
3. See for example: *Political Non-involvement and Obedience to Government – A compilation of some of the Messages of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice* (<http://www.bahaistudies.net/nonpolitical.html>) (compiled by Dr. Peter J. Khan)
4. All Ridván messages can be found at [Bahai.org](#) (<http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages>) and [Bahaiprayers.net/Ridvan](#) (<http://bahaiprayers.net/Ridvan>) (multi-lingual).
5. In line with this is the thinking that the government encouraged the campaign to distract attention from more serious problems, including acute economic difficulties. Beyond this lay the difficulty which the regime faced in harnessing the nationalist movement that had supported Musaddiq. (Akhavi 1980, pp. 76–78)
6. Statement of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Buenos Aires, 26 September 1979, cited in [Iran Human Rights Documentation Center 2007](#)

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9. [Hatcher & Martin 1998](#), p. xiii.
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11. [Hutter 2005](#), pp. 737–740.
12. [Smith 2008](#), pp. 108–109.
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14. [Daume & Watson 1992](#).
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External links

- The Bahá'í Faith (<http://www.bahai.org/>) – The international website of the Bahá'ís of the world
- "Bahā'ī Faith" (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bahai-Faith>). *Encyclopædia Britannica* Online.
- Bahá'í Faith (https://curlie.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Baha'ism/) at Curlie (based on DMOZ)

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